

Peace and Democracy for Asia

Rebuilding Trust in Divided Times

19–20 August 2027 | Bangkok, Thailand

1. Background

The Asia Centre Summit 2027 examines the intersection of peace and democracy in Asia at a time when both are under increasing strain. While many of the region's challenges are not new and are widely recognised, the central task lies in identifying democratic pathways to foster dialogue, strengthen cooperation and rebuild trust across divided societies.

Since the early 2020s, a convergence of external and internal pressures has intensified instability and fragmentation across Asia, placing a growing strain on both regional security and democratic governance. External pressures, for one, have been exerted through the strategic competition between China and the United States over regional security architecture, technological leadership and economic influence, alongside rising military expenditure, territorial disputes and armed conflict, which have deepened mistrust among states ([Milovanović, 2025](#); [He, 2025](#)). Additionally, heightened friction in the Taiwan Straits ([International Crisis Group, 2026](#)), tensions in the South China Sea ([Centre for Preventive Action, 2024](#)), periodic clashes along contested borders between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan ([Human Rights Watch, 2023](#)) and between India and Pakistan ([Centre for Preventive Action, 2026](#)) reflect more regional, persistent interstate rivalries. Although rooted within states, civil conflict in Myanmar ([International Crisis Group, 2026](#)), Southern Thailand ([International Crisis Group, 2026](#)) and Mindanao in the Philippines ([United States Institute of Peace, 2025](#)) has also produced broader regional consequences, generating refugee flows, border security challenges and economic disruption that place additional strain on the region.

Internal pressures have further deepened social divisions across many Asian societies. Tensions between ethnic, religious and national minorities and dominant political and economic centres, alongside widening inequalities and declining trust in institutions, have weakened social cohesion and democratic legitimacy ([United Nations \(UN\) Development Programme, 2022](#); [Daly, 2025](#)). In Japan, there are ongoing debates over Indigenous Peoples' rights ([Yoshikawa & McCormack, 2025](#)); in India, Muslim communities have come under attack by Hindutvas ([Jayal, 2022](#)); in Malaysia, the Indian community as a whole is vilified for the negligent actions of a few ([Loheswar, 2024](#)). Similar tensions are evident in contestations over state authority in Papua, Indonesia ([Harsono, 2024](#)), identity and inclusion in Kashmir within parts administered by China, India and Pakistan ([International Crisis Group, 2026](#)) and opposition to military base expansion in Okinawa, Japan ([Mitchell & Rabson, 2026](#)). As a result, across the region, civic space continues to narrow through restrictions on civil society, independent media and political opposition, while online speech regulations, surveillance technologies and national security legislation are increasingly used to regulate dissent and public participation ([International IDEA, 2025](#)).

These divisions are increasingly deepened and accelerated by digital technologies such as Artificial Intelligence (AI). Online hate speech, disinformation campaigns and coordinated influence operations, which have come to play a significant role in political mobilisation and public discourse across borders, now operate at heightened speeds. AI has made it easier to divide societies with competing narratives on peace, security and national identity, including through the use of synthetic media, deepfakes and automated influence campaigns. From the spread of anti-Rohingya narratives across Southeast Asia ([Sombatpoonsiri, 2026](#)) to AI-enabled disinformation campaigns that targeted public opinion during elections in Taiwan and India ([Chang et al., 2024](#)), information ecosystems have been used to reinforce exclusion and deepen social divisions.

As polarisation and insecurity deepen, governments and political actors increasingly invoke narratives of national harmony, stability and unity to justify restrictions on civic space, public participation and political opposition. Such approaches often equate peace with order and the absence of dissent while failing to address the inequalities, grievances and exclusions that drive conflict and mistrust ([Rogers, 2025](#); [Burke, 2023](#)).

Asia, therefore, highlights the distant relationship between notions of “peace” and “democracy”. However, these two concepts are intertwined. Democratic systems that lack accountability, inclusion and representation –key foundations for peace – can foster deep-seated instability. Meanwhile, peacebuilding efforts that sideline democratic principles of justice, participation and human rights would inevitably fail to address the drivers of conflict. Concerns relating to minority rights, civic freedoms and political participation, from post-conflict reconciliation and minority representation in Sri Lanka ([Mihlar, 2024](#)) to calls for greater accountability and political participation following the 2022 unrest in Kazakhstan ([Amnesty International, 2022](#)), further underscore the importance of linking peacebuilding efforts with broader democratic protections.

Hence, building peace in Asia requires a firm commitment to democratic principles to ensure lasting and effective outcomes. Several examples from across Asia illustrate how these principles have already translated into more inclusive and constructive approaches to addressing division. Civil society organisations, women’s rights and LGBTQI+ advocates, youth movements, journalists, academics, faith leaders and local communities continue to develop innovative approaches to dialogue, conflict prevention and democratic participation. From women-led peacebuilding initiatives in Mindanao ([OXFAM, 2023](#)) and community-led advocacy efforts in Kyrgyzstan ([UN Peacebuilding, 2024](#)), to youth-led democratic movements across parts of East and Southeast Asia ([UN Development Programme, 2024](#)), these efforts demonstrate that peaceful coexistence and democratic resilience are strengthened – not weakened – by inclusion, accountability and rights-based governance.

In this context, the Asia Centre Summit seeks to initiate a regional dialogue on peace and democracy in Asia. By convening stakeholders from across sectors and countries, the Summit aims to build trust, strengthen collaborative networks and identify practical approaches to managing conflict, countering polarisation and rebuilding democratic resilience in divided societies. The experiences and lessons emerging from Asia may also offer valuable insights for other regions confronting similar challenges.

2. Objectives

The conference aims to achieve the following objectives:

- Identify the key drivers of ongoing conflicts, social fragmentation and emerging flashpoints across the Asian region.
- Highlight current peacebuilding initiatives, including their strengths, limitations and potential pathways for strengthening trust and cooperation in divided societies.
- Discuss how inclusive, participatory and accountable democratic frameworks can support sustained dialogue, conflict management and the long-term maintenance of peace and social cohesion.

3. Conference Themes

The conference will examine the following sub-themes:

- Democratic Resilience Amidst Conflict
- Democratic Approaches to Peace-Building
- Self-Determination, Autonomy and Peace
- Rise of Nationalism and Identity Politics
- Women, Gender and Inclusive Peace Processes
- Youth Participation, Peace Activism and Civic Space
- Religious Freedom, Minority Rights, and Social Cohesion
- Hate Speech and Social Polarisation
- Peace Journalism, Media Ethics and Information Integrity
- Transnational Repression and the Safety of Dissidents
- Digital Democracy and Surveillance
- Technology, AI and Peace-Building

*Note: The above sub-themes are a preliminary guide. Flexibility is encouraged, and partners may propose additional topics aligned with their expertise under the overarching theme of **Peace and Democracy for Asia** to ensure contextual relevance and innovation.*

4. Conference Structure

The conference will consist of short opening remarks, keynote speeches, plenary sessions, and breakout sessions arranged according to themes and/or region and country-specific discussions. Do note: Panel themes and speaker roles are prioritised for title partners.

5. Conference Participants

Registration is open to participants from national, regional, and global organisations, including civil society organisations, faith-based NGOs, human rights organisations, media and journalism associations, legal and policy entities, parliaments and political parties, technology firms, and intergovernmental organisations. All registrations are subject to review and approval by Asia Centre.

6. Registration & Fee

Title partners to contact Asia Centre at conference@asiacentre.org for terms and conditions.

We invite all individual participants to register through this form [[HERE](#)] to confirm participation.

Registration Fee is USD 350/- per person for a single ticket.

The summit is a self-funded event. The fixed registration fee only covers the 2-day venue costs, conference materials, snacks, lunch and networking session charges at the end of the second day.